DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 331 TM 020 128

AUTHOR Cizek, Gregory J.
TITLE Home Education Research: On the Right Road?
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Book/Product Reviews (072) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Practices; *Educational Research; Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; *Home Schooling; Models; Nontraditional Education; Parents as Teachers; Private Education; Religious Cultural Groups; Research Design; *Researchers; *Research Methodology; Research Problems; Surveys; Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

A set of concerns related to home education that is infrequently studied, namely, the content and direction of research in education, is examined. Issues surrounding home education have not been given adequate attention. A sample of home education researchers was gathered by compiling a list of authors who had published in the "Home School Researcher." Nineteen of 23 surveyed authors responded with information about themselves and their research. Survey responses indicate that research on home education is being conducted by a fairly diverse group of researchers, most of whom are in education-related occupations. About half of the researchers had not engaged in home education themselves. Much of the research on home education appears to be descriptive rather than experimental or quasi-experimental. No framework exists to unite the efforts of home education researchers. Nearly half of the researchers indicated that they did not maintain an interest in home education research, but those who did suggested several directions for the field. Broad findings demonstrate that researchers in the area can benefit from a critical analysis of practice, models, and perspective. Two tables summarize characteristics of home education researchers and methodology and sampling characteristics. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

GREGORY J. CIZEK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED360331

Home Education Research: On the Right Road?

Gregory J. Cizek
Assistant Professor of Educational Research and Measurement

350 Snyder Hall
University of Toledo
Toledo, OH 43606-3390

Telephone: 419-537-2611

Presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

April 1993

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Home Education Research: On the Right Road?

As the appeal of various educational alternatives continues to increase, the number of parents choosing to educate their children at home also continues to grow (Lines, 1991). And, although there are many public policy, educational, and legal issues surrounding this alternative, they are certainly not all resolved; in fact, these concerns may also be growing correspondingly (Cibulka, 1989; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988; Zirkel, 1991). The purpose of this paper is to explore a set of concerns related to home education that is infrequently a target of inquiry--the content and direction of research on home education.

BACKGROUND

Researching home education is hardly a growth industry. By comparison, home education has not attained the status enjoyed by research on teacher education, learning styles, cooperative learning, or gender differences, to name just a few. Nevertheless, a small, but growing group of researchers have begun to conduct rigorous, academic research on the subject of home education. Several organizations have also arisen to address the need for research in the area (e.g, National Home Education Research Institute; National Center for Home Education; Home School Legal Defense Association). Accordingly, a small but growing body of research on home education has developed including books and journals, (see, for example, Ray (ed). Home School Researcher, 1985-present; VanGalen & Pitman, 1991), scholarly articles and conference papers, theses and dissertations, and independent reports.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to investigate several unexplored issues surrounding not home education as an educational alternative, but home education research itself. Specifically, it is asserted that essential

questions--vital to the conduct of scholarly investigations--have been given inadequate attention at best or, at worst, have been begged. Among these questions are:

1. Who is doing research on home education? Why? How might the knowledge base regarding home education be affected?

2. Which methodologies are commonly utilized to study home education? Are they appropriate, sufficient?

3. Is there a coherent agenda for current investigations of home education? What is that agenda? Is it too broad; too narrow?

4. What new areas for the future of home education research are likely or would be beneficial?

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

Because this study concerns the home education research agenda, information was sought from recognized investigators in the area of home education. This population is characterized by both their interest in home education and demonstration of professional contribution as evidenced by the publication of relevant research in a scholarly outlet. A group of individuals meeting these characteristics was identified by compiling a list of authors who had published an article in the Home School Researcher within the past three years. Home School Researcher is possibly the only peer-reviewed journal in the United States devoted to publishing research on home education. (Additionally, gathering a sample in this way was convenient, as names and addresses of researchers are published with their respective works.) It is recognized that this sample does not represent all home education researchers; however, it can be argued that any bias introduced is a favorable

one in that publication in a journal would usually represent higher quality scholarship than publications appearing elsewhere. Additionally, few books on the subject of home education exist, and the quality of theses and dissertations is highly variable.

A survey was developed in the fall of 1992 and mailed to the 23 first authors identified in volumes 5, 6, and 7 of Home School Researcher (1989-1991). The volumes contained a total of 24 articles written by 23 different authors on topics related to home education research. The survey contained items that formed three groupings. First, items collecting standard demographic information (e.g., AGE, GENDER, ETHNICITY, INCOME, EDUCATION, OCCUPATION) were included. Second, items common to many home education descriptive studies were asked (e.g., MARITAL STATUS, CHILDREN, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, HOME EDUCATION EXPERIENCE). Third, items specific to home education research were included (e.g., GENERAL RESEARCH INTERESTS, SPECIFIC HOME EDUCATION RESEARCH INTERESTS, DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH).

RESULTS

This section provides the results of the targeted literature review and the survey of home education researchers identified for this study. First, information about survey responses and the targeted literature review is provided. Then, results are presented thematically, corresponding to the five primary issues described in the "Objectives" section presented earlier in this paper.

Survey and Literature Results

Response rate to the survey mailing was unusually high. An initial coverletter describing the project and a subsequent follow-up mailing to nonrespondents ultimately resulted in 19 of the 23 surveys being returned. All of the returned surveys were useable, yielding a useable response rate of 82.6%. Each article appearing in the journal studied during the three year

period described above was reviewed and described according to: 1) methodology employed; 2) sample size; and 3) sampling characteristics. Interpretation of the literature review was more difficult, however, as some of the articles were difficult to classify using conventional research methodology descriptors.

Question 1 - Who is doing research on home education?

Research on home education is apparently being conducted by a fairly diverse group of researchers. Demographic characteristics of the group studied are presented in Table 1. As the table shows, the sample had a modal age of 41-50 and modal income of $35,000 to $44,999; was primarily of Caucasian ethnicity; was married; and was fairly well-educated, with 18 of the 19 respondents reporting post-graduate training. The sample was nearly equally split between males and females, and the majority of the respondents indicated that their occupation was education-related, with the largest category being college or university professor. The sample appears to be consistent with descriptions of home educators generally, in terms of age, income, education, and occupation. The sample differs in that most home education is actually delivered by females (i.e., mothers) while this sample was gender balanced.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The sample also provided other demographic information on variables commonly measured in home education research. Respondents were typically married (89.5%); had 2.2 children; and most (78.9%) indicated a religious affiliation. In these ways also, the sample appears to be similar to home educators.

However, some striking differences were noted, too. First, because of the variety of religious self-conceptions, the questionnaire item on religious

affiliation did not present choices for respondents to check, but asked for self-description of religious affiliation. Although most of the responses (68.4%) could be loosely grouped as Christian, 10.5% of the sample identified themselves as Jewish, and 21.1% indicated "none" for this item. This finding is of interest because the percentage of the sample identifying themselves as Christian is substantially lower than that usually reported in descriptive studies of home educators, indicating that home education researchers and home educators may hold differing beliefs.

Another surprising finding was that roughly half of the sample (47.4%) had never engaged in home education. Again, this finding does not support contentions that the conduct of home education is solely within the purview of home schoolers. On the other hand, those who had engaged in home education at any time were apparently willing to persevere and were not as likely to experience what has been called home schooling "burnout;" the average reported duration of home education experience was 7.6 years.

These findings may benefit the status of home education research in that they might serve to ameliorate the apprehensions of home education research critics, who express concern that home education research may be biased by overrepresentation of researchers who hold strong religious beliefs and/or are home education advocates. Interestingly, even some of the questionnaire respondents who had published an article on home eduction expressed these concerns. For example, one respondent expressed the opinion that "many of the researchers are conservative Christians who are advocates of home schooling and [are] unable to be neutral scholars;" another respondent noted that "I am concerned that most (or at least a large number) of the home schooling research was conducted by home schooling advocates."

However, taken together, the data on religious affiliation and home education experience gathered for this study do not support such concerns. Indeed, they suggest that those engaging in home education and those engaging in home education research form somewhat distinct groups and that home

education research is not the sole domain of its advocates. Further, when respondents indicated their general research interests in response to one of the questionnaire items, home education was mentioned as a primary interest less than 30% of the time. Other commonly mentioned research interests included cognitive/educational psychology, gifted education, and literacy. As is likely the case for researchers in other fields of educational inquiry, those conducting home education research may exhibit a common interest in the field, while possessing differing degrees of personal connection.

Question 2 - Which methodologies are commonly utilized to study home education?

A 1988 review of home education research by Wright (1988) revealed that much of the research on home education is descriptive as opposed to experimental or quasi-experimental. This trend appears to be continuing. The research reviewed for this study consisted of primarily survey or other descriptive designs and only one of the studies employed random sampling any aspect of the research. In many instances, description of the sampling procedures was not included in the research reports or was insufficient to determine how sampling had been conducted. Additionally, sample sizes were generally small to moderate. Table 2 presents a compilation of the methodologies, sample sizes, and sampling plans utilized in the 24 articles studied.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Obviously, controlled experiments involving random assignment to treatment (home education) and control (other educational settings) groups has not been utilized. However, more carefully conceived research designs are clearly needed in home education research. First, attempts to study "unavailable" samples must be undertaken. Much of the research reviewed

involved sampling frames derived from publishers lists, church groups, newsletter mailing lists, etc. Current research on home education has revealed much information about families who volunteer to participate in home education research; these families may represent the "better" side of the total population. We seemingly know little or nothing about other, "underground" or less-willing to be studied families.

Also, other research designs can be employed to more accurate comparisons between home educated students and those educated in traditional settings. For example, comparative studies of academic achievement could employ matching of subjects on relevant characteristics. Sophistication in statistical analysis of data is also lacking. Even when sample sizes are sufficient, data analytic approaches for controlling for effects of important variables are frequently not utilized. Finally, longitudinal studies are conspicuously absent from the research designs observed. It is clear that investigations aimed at tracking home schooled students into and through their return to traditional educational settings and even into their entry into the work force would complement the wealth of descriptive, single time point research that currently exists.

Question 3 - Is there a coherent agenda for current investigations of home education?

No. The research reviewed for this study revealed that no framework exists which might unite the efforts of home education researchers. For example, although many of the articles reviewed cited a common literature, any theoretical framework motivating the research was usually weak or absent. Much of the home education research also appears to be parochial, with researchers often only interested in practice within a region such as their state, or within a discipline such as mathematics. Home education research appears to be lurching forward, conducted by researchers who do not share a common research agenda or vision. Possibly, this is the result of the lack of

a strong theoretical base to guide research efforts, to a lack of communication between researchers in the field, or to both. Regardless, a review of the literature yields the conclusion that applied research has greatly outpaced theoretical development and that the latter is urgently needed in order to help develop a coherent research agenda.

Further, nearly all of the research on home education appears to focus almost exclusively on cognitive outcomes of home education (e.g., academic achievement) or on socialization of home educated students. Little or no attention has been given to psychomotor outcomes. Additionally, surprisingly scant attention has been given to religious, spiritual, or pro-social outcomes. The reason that this finding is surprising is that it is in contrast to the repeated finding that the primary motivation for most home educators reflects a moral, spiritual, or religious component (see, Gustafson, 1988; Lines, 1991; Mayberry, 1991; Van Galen, 1988). For example, reporting on research conducted with home schooling families in the western United States, Mayberry described the primacy of religious motivation:

> "The largest category of home school parents are those motivated by religious beliefs (65%)....They believe that it is their duty to instill particular religious beliefs and values in their children....Religious home school parents advocate an education for their children that is organized and controlled by parents and that focuses on Biblical training and teaching religious history" (1988, p. 37).

Although not the only motivation, it is well documented, then, that the primary motivation for parents choosing home education is their desire to address the perceived spiritual, moral, or religious needs of their children. If this is the case, then a primary measure of home education's effectiveness would seem to be more appropriately focused on the extent to which progress

toward specified moral, spiritual, or religious outcomes are attained. However, the literature reveals that home education research may be driven more by an unconscious desire to assess home schooling from a traditional, institutional education framework--by standards of evidence and rationales that are external to the stated goals of the movement--than by an alternative, radical approach that would be suggested by the counter-institutional, individualistic nature of the movement.

Alternatively, perhaps the neglect in studying clearly relevant outcomes lies in the difficulty of specifying what the desirable outcomes are and deciding upon how they might be measured. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the difficulties will not be grappled with until the larger issue is seen as a legitimate area of inquiry and ground breaking research efforts aimed at defining and describing are begun.

Question 4 - What new areas for home education research are likely?

The survey of researchers who had published articles related to their research on home education yielded interesting information about the possible future of home education. One startling bit of information concerned an item on the questionnaire that asked respondents if they had maintained an active involvement in home eduction research since the publication of their work. Of the 19 respondents, nearly half (47.4%) indicated that they did not maintain an interest in home education research. However, several respondents to the questionnaire provided insights into what the future of home education might hold.

First, many respondents remarked about some of the weakness in the home education research previously discussed in this paper. For example, the need for more rigorous and more appropriate research designs, the need for more theoretical development, and the need to study "non-traditional" home educators were mentioned by respondents as issues that might guide future research.

Home Education Research

Three respondents indicated that research should be undertaken to investigate what home educators actually do. Such studies might examine the teaching strategies used by home educators, the quality and effectiveness of home instruction, the role that each of the parents actually plays in home education, or the effects of long term home schooling (including psychological effects) on both students and parents.

Additionally, several respondents indicated that few attempts have been made to establish linkages between home education research and educational research generally. For example, it would appear that research findings on effective practices in home education would be germane to current debates on general educational reform. Apparently, however, an ineffective system of communicating research results--or, an uninterested audience--have hindered the dissemination of relevant information, and respondents indicated that research into systems of home education information dissemination should proceed.

Finally, respondents mentioned the need to investigate home school/ public school/ private school connections and their links to higher education and later life. The need to examine possibilities for collaboration between home educators and school officials was stressed, as was the need to examine the political organization of home schooling families.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For home education researchers, reflections on the status of an implicit research agenda can assist in refining current efforts and suggesting potential future direction. The broad findings of this study reveal that researchers in the area of home education can benefit from a critical analysis of current practice, paradigm, and perspective. This research has yielded a picture of home education research that is somewhat disjointed, has not addressed a primary outcome of home education, is comparatively weak in terms of traditional academic rigor, is in need of a unifying theoretical framework

to guide research, and contains many areas for fruitful future research.

Despite the weaknesses, this study has revealed some unexpected findings about the practice of home education research. For example, it was observed that home education research is apparently conducted by a diverse group of scholars, who do not necessarily comprise a "closed system" of non-objective advocates. If not for the efforts of these researchers, knowledge about home education would be nearly nonexistent.

The research presented in this paper may also be useful to educators outside of home education. Issues and concerns facing one segment of researchers in private education necessarily affect others. Thus, this research may be of interest to researchers concerned with other alternatives such as Catholic education, Protestant academies, or other private schools. Certainly the issues, problems, and trends identified by the home education researchers surveyed in this study may provide valuable insights for the others.

Finally, it is observed that research on educational alternatives is particularly essential in times of pressures for general educational reform. The efforts of home education researchers have been beneficial to legislators, policy makers, and school officials, as well as to those engaged in home education, but the benefits of their research may transcend these audiences. For example, the future directions of research on home education might stimulate innovation and can offer transferrable educational practices that could benefit American education generally. The home education research agendas identified in this study may provide a critical testing ground for enlightened practice in other settings if further research shows that what works in home schools may be efficaciously imported into other educational environments, especially in the traditional educational system.

REFERENCES

Cibulka, J. G. (1989, March). State regulation of home schooling: A policy analysis. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Gustafson, S. K. (1988). A study of home schooling: Parental motivation and goals. Home School Researcher, 4(2) 4-12.

Lines, P. M. (1991). Home instruction: Characteristics, size, and growth. In J. VanGalen and M. A. Pitman (Eds.), Home schooling: Political, historical, and pedagogical perspectives. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Mayberry, M. (1988). Characteristics and attitudes of families who home school. Education and Urban Society, 21(1), 32-41.

Mayberry, M. (1991). Political and religious beliefs of home school parents: Results of an ongoing study in four western states. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

National Association of State Boards of Education (1988). Home schooling. Washington, DC: Author.

Ray, B. D. (Ed.) (1985-1991). Home School Researcher.

Van Galen, J. A. (1988). Ideology, curriculum, and pedagogy in home education. Education and Urban Society, 21(1), 52-68.

Van Galen, J., & Pitman, M.A. (Eds.) (1991). Home schooling: Political, historical, and pedagogical perspectives. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Wright, C. (1988). Home school research: Critique and suggestions for the future. Educational and Urban Society, 21(1), 96-113.

Zirkel, P. A. (1991). Home schooling. Phi Delta Kappan, 72(5), 408-409.

TABLE 1

Selected Characteristics of Home Education Researchers

Variable	Value		Frequency
1. **AGE**	21-30		0 (0.0%)
	31-40		7 (36.8%)
	41-50		9 (47.4%)
	51-60		3 (15.8%)
	61-70		0 (0.0%)
	over 70		0 (0.0%)
		Total	19 (100.0%)
2. **GENDER**	Male		10 (52.6%)
	Female		9 (47.4%)
		Total	19 (100.0%)
3. **ETHNICITY**	Caucasian		16 (84.2%)
	African American		1 (5.3%)
	Hispanic		0 (0.0%)
	Asian		0 (0.0%)
	American Indian		1 (5.3%)
	Other		1 (5.3%)
		Total	19 (100.0%)
4. **ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME**	Less than $15,000		0 (0.0%)
	$15,000 - $24,999		0 (0.0%)
	$25,000 - $34,999		4 (21.1%)
	$35,000 - $44,999		5 (26.3%)
	$45,000 - $54,999		3 (15.8%)
	$55,000 - $64,999		1 (5.3%)
	$65,000 - $74,999		2 (10.5%)
	$75,000 or greater		4 (21.1%)
		Total	19 (100.1%)*
5. **OCCUPATION**	School Administrator		2 (10.5%)
	School Teacher		3 (15.8%)
	School Support Staff		2 (10.5%)
	College/University Prof.		7 (36.8%)
	Consultant/Business Owner		3 (15.8%)
	State Agency Employee		1 (5.3%)
	Graduate Student		1 (5.3%)
		Total	19 (100.0%)*

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variable	Value	Frequency
6. **CURRENT MARITAL STATUS**	Single	2 (10.5%)
	Married	17 (89.5%)
	Divorced	0 (0.0%)
	Other	0 (0.0%)
	Total	19 (100.0%)
7. **NUMBER OF CHILDREN**	0	4 (21.1%)
	1	3 (15.8%)
	2	3 (15.8%)
	3	5 (26.3%)
	4	3 (15.8%)
	5	1 (5.3%)
	6+	0 (0.0%)
	Total	19 (100.1%)*
8. **RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION** (self-description)	Baptist	3 (15.8%)
	Bible Christian	5 (26.3%)
	Congregationalist	1 (5.3%)
	Charismatic Christian	2 (10.5%)
	Evangelical Protestant	1 (5.3%)
	Fundamentalist Christian	1 (5.3%)
	Jewish	2 (10.5%)
	None	4 (21.1%)
	Total	10 (100.1%)*
9. **HOME EDUCATION EXPERIENCE**	None	9 (47.4%)
	1 year	0 (0.0%)
	2 years	2 (10.5%)
	3 years	0 (0.0%)
	4 years	0 (0.0%)
	5 years	0 (0.0%)
	6 years	0 (0.0%)
	7 years	2 (10.5%)
	8 years	1 (5.3%)
	9 years	1 (5.3%)
	10 years	3 (15.8%)
	11 years	1 (5.3%)
	Total	19 (100.1%)*

* Note: Totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2

Home Education Research Methodology and Sampling Characteristics

Methodology	Study Number	Sample Size	Sampling Plan
Multi-subject Descriptive (questionnaire, survey, interview, etc.)	1	199	not reported
	2	100	not reported
	3	?	not reported
	4	76	not reported
	5	176	non-random
	6	25	non-random
	7	174	not reported
	8	10	non-random
	9	?	not reported
Single-subject Descriptive	10	1	non-random
Case Study	11	n/a	non-random
	12	n/a	non-random
Legal/Policy Analysis	13	n/a	n/a
	14	n/a	n/a
	15	n/a	n/a
	16	n/a	n/a
Historical	17	n/a	n/a
Theoretical	18	n/a	n/a
Causal-Comparative	19	87/?	mixed (stratified non-random, non-random)
	20	226/231	mixed (multi-stage random cluster sampling and non-random)
	21	37/77/134	non-random
	22	22/24	not reported
	23	67/1183	not reported, not reported)
Correlational	24	877	non-random

Notes:

1) n/a = not applicable
2) ? = unknown
3) Non-random includes studies in which non-random sampling is described and those in which description of sampling plan is insufficient but suggests non-random sampling.